

Chicago Eagle.

"INDEPENDENT IN ALL THINGS. NEUTRAL IN NONE."

VOLUME XIII.

CHICAGO, SATURDAY, JANUARY 4, 1896—TWELVE PAGES.

NUMBER 326.

IT IS VIRTUAL CONFISCATION!

That Is What Taxation Means Now-a-Days to the Suffering People of Chicago.

Side-Burns Baker Makes His Usual Yawp About Pure Primaries and Over-Paid Police,

But Fails to Say Anything About the Tax-Dodgers Who Do the Bribing.

Mayor Swift Gives Him Some Valuable Hints, However, in Strong, Terse, Plain Terms.

It is only a step from the position in which local taxation has now drifted to confiscation.

No one is to blame for this but our so-called "public spirited citizens," who form themselves into associations for the purpose of cleaning alleys and defending companies that sell ice to the people, which is cut from frozen sewers.

These "public spirited citizens" are the fellows who bribe the Assessors to make their taxes low, and then howl about "pure primaries."

Chicago's leaders in "public spirit" as a rule, are men who gladly commit perjury to escape payment of a just personal property tax, and who do not hesitate to commit bribery in the interest of a low real estate valuation.

This is no exaggeration. The taxable valuation of Chicago, according to the Assessors' books, is twenty millions of dollars less today than it was twenty years ago!

And the city is five times larger today than it was then!

The burdens of government and taxation, thus shifted by the rich, fall upon the shoulders of the poor, and the result is an enormous increase in the taxes of honest people who can ill afford to stand the rate.

The rate jumped from \$7 on the \$100 in 1874 to over \$10 on the \$100 in 1895.

This is due to the action of the State Board of Equalization, a body kept in existence for the purpose of helping out "public spirited citizens" who do not want to pay their just dues.

The State Board just waits until the Assessors have fixed up their books.

In the meantime the "public spirited" millionaires have fixed up things and tell the State Board to go ahead. It goes ahead, and adds 17 per cent on lots, 20 per cent on lands and 10 per cent on personal property that has been honestly assessed.

This hurts the small taxpayer, for the big fellow has taken care of himself.

The town of North Chicago suffers less than either of the South or West Towns.

So it is a fair criterion to go by. Figures do not lie.

Here is the comparative statement of tax rates for the town of North Chicago for the years 1892-3-4-5 on \$100, as equalized by State Board:

	1895.	1894.	1893.	1892.
State.....	.52	.51	.51	.51
County.....	.70 3-10	.70 7-10	.77 8-10	.77 8-10
City.....	2.53 3-12	5.05	4.76	4.60 8-10 4.77 9-10
School.....	.19	.21	.16 5-10	.16 8-10
Town.....	.38	.74	.91 7-10	.74 9-10
Lincoln Park Tax.....	.24	.49	.51 1-10	.50 7-10
L. P. Bonded Indebtedness.....	1.50	.50	.50	.50
Sanitary.....	.30	.10 9-10	.10 9-10	.21 1-10
Public Library.....				
Total.....	10.023 3-10	7.97 6-10	7.08 8-10	7.90

The State Board added to assessors' valuation for 1895, 17 per cent. on lots, 20 per cent. on lands and 10 per cent. on personal property.

Now, what is the remedy for all this? A number of leading citizens, some of whom are well posted on the subject from personal experience, spoke on the matter at the Commercial Club banquet Saturday night.

Mayor Swift had spoken at the opening, giving a statement of Chicago's monetary embarrassments and what he considered their cause. Joseph Medill had followed with suggestions of a remedy he considered practicable, and then William T. Baker, President of the

Civic Federation and the Board of Trade, was asked by President King to make an address.

Mr. Baker took occasion to criticize the present administration, and it was this which provoked the sensational reply of the Mayor. The statements to which Mayor Swift took the strongest exceptions were these:

"I know of no reason why insufficient service in the City Hall should be paid a higher rate of wages than merchants pay for inefficient service for the same hours of labor. The policemen of this city are paid higher wages than nine-tenths of them could get in any other service for which they are capable."

"I read in a newspaper a statement made by the chairman of the Finance Committee—I may be allowed to refer to it, for he is a member of the dominant party—that four men are employed where two could do the work, and some are employed in minor services who are not required at all. Now, I do not know that this is a true statement. I would like to see the reform begin right there. Let us cut our coat according to the cloth we have. That is what you would do, Mr. Chairman, if an emergency should arise in your business."

"There is a great deal of feeling in the town now about giving franchises in the streets to cable railroads and to other corporations without compensation. I do not believe a single railroad or other corporation should even be allowed to use the streets without compensation to the city."

Mr. Baker had hardly sat down when Mayor Swift was on his feet to reply. He was highly wrought up and spoke with a total disregard of the reception his words might receive. Still he gave but little outward sign of excitement more than speaking in a more than ordinary impressive tone, and his sentences were pronounced slowly, and each one carefully weighed before being formulated. He was evidently much in earnest and his audience listened in amazement, but with deep attention while he spoke as follows:

"The gentleman has referred to a statement supposed to have been made by a member of the City Council in which he said there were four men doing the work where two only were required. In answer to that I will state

It is absolutely untrue. I will further state that in conversation with the Commissioner of Public Works he told me he had nine men repairing bridges and viaducts, and four of the time kept their berths through the Aldermen.

"He speaks of increased revenues from saloons. What is the question which presents itself to the saloon-keeper when asked to increase his license? This is it: Why not make the tax-dodger come to the front and pay his just proportion of the taxes, and until you do that don't go to the saloon man and ask him to pay more."

"The present Mayor, within sixty days, has vetoed a half-dozen ordin-

ances passed by your representatives giving space in the streets to representative property-owners, who came to the Common Council and asked for them.

"Who is it that comes into the Common Council and asks for such privileges? Who is it who are accused of offering bribes for such franchises? It is just the same ones, the same prominent citizens that come into the same Council Chamber and ask them to give them the right to occupy space under your streets."

"I tell you these questions come home. Talk about anarchy; talk about breeding the spirit of communism! What does it more than the representative citizen of Chicago, your high-toned business men, your patriotic men, your prominent citizens of Chicago are the men who knock at the door of the Council and ask for illegal franchises? It is not the common people."

"Take the remedy, then, into your own hands. Into your circle of prominent business men, and teach them patriotism. I refute the statement that this government is not economically administered. It is."

"Who fixes the salaries of the police? Your representatives, the people whom you send to the Council. There is much for you gentlemen, representative men, and I believe I address representative men, business men—successful business men—to do and you have a duty to perform."

"Who bribes the Common Council? It is not men in the common walks of life. They are men in your own walks of life, sitting by your firesides, at your clubs."

"Is it your men in the common walks of life that demand bribes and who receive bribes at the hands of the legislative bodies or the Common Council? No. It is your representative citizen, your capitalists, your business men. When have they come to the front, either individually or collectively, and leveled against this matter of obtaining franchises? When will they come to the front, individually or collectively, and ask of the Common Council adequate remuneration for the city? Never, to my knowledge."

"Who is responsible for the condition of affairs in the city of Chicago? Your representative business men. If an assessor grows rich while in office, with whom does he divide? Not with the common people. He divides with the man who tempts him to make a low assessment, not the man who has the humble little house, but the capitalist and the business man. These are plain words, but they are true."

"I will tell you a good work for your Civic Federation, Brother Baker, and I believe you are honest, and I have found you honest in every endeavor. Confine your theories and efforts in the next three months to elect to the City Council six or eight representative business men. Give me Lyman J. Gage from the Twenty-second Ward; give me Charles B. Farwell from his ward; give me E. G. Keith from the Second Ward. Let them come over any Monday night and witness the scenes I have witnessed, and they will cease talking about theories, and understand better the conditions which face the citizens and the city of Chicago."

"I have nothing to take back or amend," said Mayor Swift after it was over. "There is one thing, however, I had in mind, but forgot to say in my

speech. When the Union Loop ordinance was under consideration these same men came to me and begged me under no consideration to demand any recompense for the city, as the loop was such a necessary thing. Then they went into court afterwards and under oath acknowledged they had received from \$5,000 to \$15,000 apiece for giving their consent to the passage of that same ordinance."

WHAT MR. THOMAS SAYS.
The Present South Town Assessor Agrees with the Mayor.

Ambrose L. Thomas, South Town Assessor, in commenting on the Swift and Baker speeches, said:

"From my own experience I know the Mayor is perfectly right in saying the present system of assessments is absolutely wrong and inadequate. It must be changed. The thing cannot go on as it is much longer. The radical fault is the shortness of time allowed the assessors for doing the work. It is simply a physical and human impossibility for any man to make equitable assessments in justice to himself or to the property-owners in the length of time now allowed."

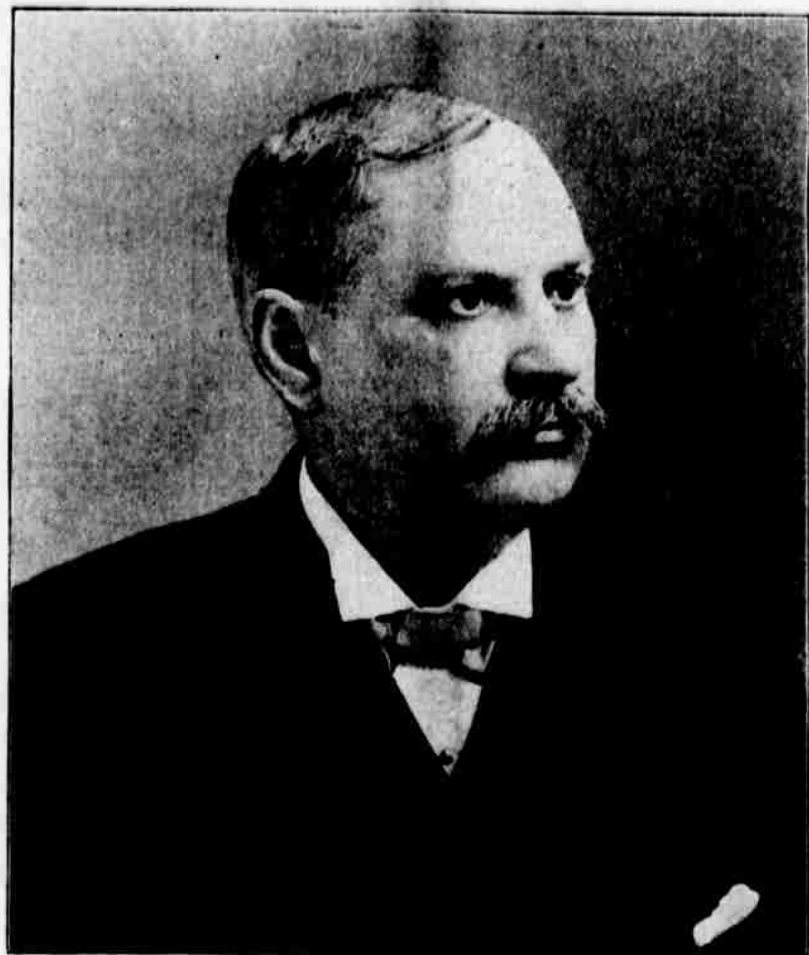
"There must be some new way to get at it. The best plan I could think of would be for a board of, say, three assessors for the whole city, elected for a term of not less than three years; possibly it would be better if the term were five years. It would be a good plan to have the assessors elected at different times, so that the terms of all three would not expire the same year. The assessor's office should be open the whole year round. New assessments on real estate should be made once every four years. All assessments should be made on actual cash valuation or on an arbitrary percentage of the cash valuation. With plenty of competent help I think this would come near remedying the evil."

"As at present handled the Assessor's office is open from May 1 to July 1, and the element of time is the worst feature of the system. When a new man takes the office he has no time to make new assessments. The old ones go through on precedent, and in many cases they have been doing this for years. It is ridiculous to think of fair assessments in the time the assessor has to do the work."

"This is my first year in the office and it will be my last. I have had enough. I am not a candidate for re-election. When I took the office nine-tenths of the assessments went through on precedent. There was nothing else to do. We worked day and night and on Sundays right up to the last day, and I am willing to go on record as saying that no man can make equitable assessments under the present system."

"There is no way to dodge the assessment. I suppose what the Mayor meant was a property-owner might influence the assessor's office to make a low assessment. The owner has redress for too high assessments, but nobody is going to complain if his assessment is too low. I do not know how the system can be changed unless by act of Legislature. This would be a good time to change it, now that discussion of the thing has been started."

"Under the present system if a mistake is made it is likely to run along for years before a new assessment is



GEN. R. J. SMITH.

A Leader in the Insurance World—Secretary of the Traders Insurance Company.

O. W. POTTER FEARS A REVOLT.

He Says that the People Are Determined Not to Be Taxed to Death,

And Points Out Some Frightful Injustices Practiced in the Name of the Law.

John De Koven, the Veteran Banker, Opens Up on the Subject in Delightful Fashion.

South Town Assessor Ambrose L. Thomas Agrees with Mayor Swift and Makes Suggestions.

"Our system of taxation is infernal," said O. W. Potter. "What are called the middle and poorer classes know this and as a result they are getting ripe for a revolution. They will not continue to live under such a system. They believe, and they are right to a great extent, the wealthier classes go free, while the poorer must bear the burden of taxation."

Mr. Potter was in the study of his gray stone residence on the Lake Shore drive and was speaking on the general subject of Mayor Swift's reply to W. T. Baker at the Commercial Club banquet, when he said what is given above. Mr. Potter discussed at length the subject of municipal reform, with special reference to taxation, and at all points was the champion of the cause of the poor.

Surrounded by personal property at whose value one could only guess, he advocated the making public of the personal property tax books and the giving of the right to the taxed poor man to find out by inspection of the actual property of his richer neighbor whether the tax had been equitably adjusted or not.

"Do you believe actually, Mr. Potter, there is danger of a revolution?"

"You know," was the quick answer, "how little it takes to set things in an uproar, and this thing we are discussing is not little. I know one year ago last summer, when the strike was on and a mob was burning and destroying, there was sympathy for the violent acts and for the actors in quarters where in other days you did not find such sympathy. People of what is called the better class did not say much, but their faces showed they did not condemn strongly the spirit which prompted the deeds. The truth was and is the great middle and better classes of the people feel they are not getting what they should, and this feeling is growing."

"We had in our employ at one time between 5,000 and 6,000 men, nearly all of whom were trying to pay for their little homes. Under the iniquitous system of taxation they paid the levy to the full limit, while the richer people went comparatively free, and, mark you, the poorer people knew it."

"If I am taxed \$500 for this residence here and a workman in a cottage elsewhere is taxed \$500, there ought to be some way by which he can see I am compelled to pay what I ought to pay. In the first place there should be a commission of well-qualified and honest men to fix the value of realty in this city and the improvements thereon. These values should be accessible to all, and then the poorer man can tell readily whether he is paying more taxes in proportion to the value of his holding than his richer neighbor."

"The personal property tax is another thing of which the poorer people complain. There is discrimination. The facts of the tax list should be made known and then let the man who thinks unjust discrimination has been made come to my house or to Potter Palmer's house and see if we have paid for what is ours, as he has been made to pay for what is his. The poor people know the present system is a lie, and that they suffer by reason of it."

"The power wealth brings can be so used that by its means the rich need not be made richer nor the poor poorer. I hate to say it, but our government will not hold together another century if the prevailing sort of thing goes on. There is not enough of putting one's self in another's place in this world. If a man who is rich is about to do something that will hurt the interests of a poorer neighbor let him change places

with him mentally for a few minutes and ask himself if he would like to be treated the same way. Here is a good chance, then, for the application of the golden rule. If men only could get to realizing how others feel there would be a chance for better government."

"Mayor Swift said one thing last night which will appeal to the feeling of the middle class, if, I say again, we may so call it. 'Who pays bribes for franchises? It is not the middle class.'"

"Not to interrupt you, Mr. Potter, who does do the bribing?"

"That is for you to answer. I cannot do it speedily."

"The present system of things political prevents business men from going into public life. Our system of elective franchise is nearly fatal to the proper government of large cities. If there were only some way of running the municipality on a business basis, there are some business men who could give the time to go into the Council, but it would be impossible for enough of them to get in to be of service. They would form a hopeless minority, and, as far as they were concerned, it would be a waste of time."

"There are men in the Commercial Club who, if they could be given the power, could take hold of the city government and run it on business principles for five years, say, and at the end of that time the municipality would be in a better condition financially and from a health standpoint than ever before. Practically every man in the Commercial Club is indebted to Chicago for what he is today. Environment, as much as personal effort, has aided him and he owes a duty to the city which he should pay, but how he can pay it under the existing order of things is a question. All the members would go in if they could and work as in a business concern. Some person or persons must give up the time to think out a means of changing matters. As they now are we are drifting on to a revolution."

"It is an absurdity to have sixty-eight Aldermen. Let us have a greatly reduced number and let there be legislation to fix firmly the responsibility as well as the power on those who go into office in the City Hall."

"Special privileges should be paid for, and paid for well. Great corporations should be made to pay in proportion to what they get. Then, again, some system should be devised so people who use the roadway pavement should pay for it. The shutters should pay for putting it down, but many of these shutters are poor and do not ride in carriages, yet they are obliged to pay for repairing after the rich man's vehicle has worn the roadway out."

"There ought to be some way to fix this matter. The present system is unjust. People ought not to be allowed to block the walks with goods nor the streets with wagons. Horses are allowed to stand along the curbs for hours, as though Chicago were a country town."

"Reform ought to be begun, and at once. This talk of Chicago being too young to reform these long standing abuses is all rot. Swift knows what is wanted. Let him stir things. It will be provocative of good."

"We need legislation, of course. The first step to that must be the sending to Springfield of the right kind of men to see that we get what we need."

The Governor of Kentucky only promises 1,200 men for military service in the event of war with England. It must have been his intention to muster in nobody beneath the rank of colonel.